

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
NORTHERN DIVISION

JUAN L. HAWKINS-NEAL #261184,

Plaintiff,

Case No. 2:07-cv-222

v.

Honorable R. Allan Edgar

ROGER HAAPALA, et al.,

Defendants.

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

This is a civil rights action brought by a state prisoner pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The Court has granted Plaintiff leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*, and Plaintiff has paid the initial partial filing fee. Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, PUB. L. NO. 104-134, 110 STAT. 1321 (1996), the Court is required to dismiss any prisoner action brought under federal law if the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2), 1915A; 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must read Plaintiff's *pro se* complaint indulgently, *see Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), and accept Plaintiff's allegations as true, unless they are clearly irrational or wholly incredible. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992). Applying these standards, I recommend that Plaintiff's complaint be dismissed for failure to state a claim.

Discussion

I. Factual allegations

Plaintiff Juan L. Hawkins-Neal, an inmate at the Baraga Maximum Correctional Facility (AMF), filed this *pro se* civil rights action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against Defendants Corrections Officer Roger Haapala, Corrections Officer S. Holma, Corrections Officer C. Nagele, Resident Unit Manager T. Smith, Assistant Resident Unit Supervisor T. Perttu, and Warden Greg McQuiggin. Plaintiff alleges in his complaint that AMF goes by the nickname “Baraga Mississippi.” Plaintiff was confined at AMF from December 1999 until September 2000, during which he engaged in numerous assaults on staff.

On April 27, 2007, Plaintiff was transferred back to AMF. Plaintiff then sent a kite to Defendant McQuiggin and Assistant Deputy Warden Luetzow, requesting a Special Problem Offender Notice (SPON) requiring that he be kept separated from Defendant Haapala. Plaintiff states that he had thrown bodily waste on Defendant Haapala while he was incarcerated at AMF in 1999 and 2000, and feared being harmed by Defendant Haapala as a result. Plaintiff claims that Defendants Haapala, Holma and Nagele made threats and racial comments and arbitrarily placed him on food loaf. Plaintiff also claims that Defendants denied him food trays on nine separate occasions. Plaintiff alleges that on July 19, 2007, Defendant Holma subjected him to excessive force. Plaintiff claims that he complained about the conduct of Defendants Haapala, Holma, and Nagele to Defendants Smith, Perttu, and McQuiggin on several occasions, to no avail.

Plaintiff claims that Defendants violated his rights under the Eighth Amendment, as well as the Substantive Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Plaintiff seeks compensatory and punitive damages, as well as costs.

II. Failure to state a claim

A complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted when it is clear that no relief could be granted under any set of facts that could be proved consistent with the allegations of the complaint. *Jones v. City of Carlisle*, 3 F.3d 945, 947 (6th Cir. 1993). To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the federal Constitution or laws and must show that the deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); *Street v. Corr. Corp. of Am.*, 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996). Because § 1983 is a method for vindicating federal rights, not a source of substantive rights itself, the first step in an action under § 1983 is to identify the specific constitutional right allegedly infringed. *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994).

Plaintiff's Eighth Amendment claim regarding the food loaf restriction fails. The Eighth Amendment imposes a constitutional limitation on the power of the states to punish those convicted of crimes. Punishment may not be "barbarous" nor may it contravene society's "evolving standards of decency." *Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337, 346 (1981). The Eighth Amendment is only concerned with "deprivations of essential food, medical care, or sanitation" or "other conditions intolerable for prison confinement." *Id.* at 348. With regard to food, prisoners must receive adequate nutrition to maintain normal health; the food need not be tasty or aesthetically pleasing. *See Cunningham v. Jones*, 567 F.2d 653, 659-60 (6th Cir. 1977). The Sixth Circuit has repeatedly held that a diet of food loaf does not violate the Eighth Amendment because nutritional and caloric requirements are met. *See, e.g., Payton-Bey v. Vidor*, No. 94-2472, 1995 WL 603241, at *1 (6th Cir. Oct. 12, 1995); *Hinton v. Doney*, No. 93-2050, 1994 WL 20225, at *2 (6th Cir. Jan. 26, 1994); *Boswell v. Meyers*, No. 89-2144, 1990 WL 109230, at *1 (6th Cir. Aug. 2, 1990).

Plaintiff claims that Defendant Holma subjected him to excessive force. Plaintiff attaches his grievance, appeals and the responses regarding this claim to his complaint. According to the step II grievance response, Plaintiff's claim was that Defendant Holma grabbed his arms and pulled on the restraint strap while escorting Plaintiff from the shower. In responding to the grievance, Defendant McQuiggin noted that during the alleged incident, Plaintiff stopped on the way back to his cell and began to threaten Defendant Holma. Consequently, Defendant Holma grabbed Plaintiff by the arm and escorted him to his cell. Defendant McQuiggin further noted that a threatening behavior misconduct was written on Plaintiff concerning this incident.

An Eighth Amendment claim comprises an objective and subjective component: (1) a sufficiently grave deprivation and (2) a sufficiently culpable state of mind. *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 834 (1994); *Rodgers v. Jabe*, 43 F.3d 1082, 1086 (6th Cir. 1995). Plaintiff must prove these elements by a preponderance of the evidence. *Brooks v. Celeste*, 39 F.3d 125, 127-128 (6th Cir. 1994). Taking Plaintiff's allegation as true, plaintiff's allegations are insufficient to state a claim because the alleged deprivation is not sufficiently grave.

Only those deprivations denying "the minimal civilized measure of life's necessities" are sufficiently grave for an Eighth Amendment claim. *Hudson v. McMillian*, 503 U.S. 1, 8-9 (1992). A de minimis use of physical force is beyond constitutional recognition, provided that the use of force is not of a sort "repugnant to mankind." *Id.* at 9-10 (quoting *Whitley v. Albers*, 475 U.S. 312, 327 (1986)); see *Norman v. Taylor*, 25 F.3d 1259, 1264 (4th Cir. 1994), *cert. denied* 513 U.S. 1114 (1995) ("absent the most extraordinary circumstances, a plaintiff cannot prevail on an Eighth Amendment excessive force claim if his injury is de minimis). Federal courts have routinely held that a single push, shove, punch, or blow by a prison guard does not rise to the level of a constitutional violation. *Neal v. Miller*, 778 F. Supp. 378, 383-384 (W.D. Mich. 1991) (collecting

cases). The same hold true even when the push or shove appears to be unnecessary. *Hampton v. Alexander*, No. 95-3457, 1996 WL 40237 (6th Cir. Jan. 31, 1996). There are no extraordinary or unusual circumstances surrounding the alleged conduct by Defendant Holma. Plaintiff does not allege that he was injured by the conduct. From his allegations, it is plain that any injury was de minimis. Thus, Plaintiff's allegation that Defendant Holma grabbed his arms and pulled on the restraint strap does not rise to the level of a constitutional deprivation.

Moreover, Plaintiff's claims of abusive language, or of general harassment, do not state an eighth amendment or substantive due process violation. *Ivey v. Wilson*, 832 F.2d 950 (6th Cir. 1987); *Ishaq v. Compton*, 900 F. Supp. 935, 944 (W.D. Tenn., 1995); *Meadows v. Gibson*, 855 F. Supp. 223, 225 (W.D. Tenn., 1994); *Banks v. Klapish*, 717 F. Supp. 520 (W.D. Mich. 1989); *Gilson v. Cox*, 711 F. Supp. 354 (E.D. Mich. 1989); *Rahman v. Stephenson*, 626 F. Supp. 886, 888 (W.D. Tenn. 1986). Even the occasional or sporadic use of racial slurs, although unprofessional and reprehensible, does not rise to a level of constitutional magnitude. *See, Torres v. County of Oakland*, 758 F.2d 147, 152 (6th Cir. 1985).

Plaintiff claims that he was denied meal trays on nine occasions. Plaintiff sent letters of complaint to numerous individuals and the matter was investigated by the Correction Division of the Attorney General's Office. Plaintiff includes copies of the letters and responses as attachments to his complaint. In a letter to Stacy A. Hickox at the Michigan Protection & Advocacy Service dated July 10, 2007, Assistant Attorney General Leo H. Friedman states that Plaintiff refused to return his meal trays, which resulted in Plaintiff receiving a major misconduct and food loaf restrictions. Plaintiff does not state that he suffered any physical harm from the alleged denial of meal trays. In the opinion of the undersigned, these allegations do not rise to the level of an Eighth Amendment violation.

Moreover, as noted above, Plaintiff received misconduct tickets regarding his refusal to return his meal trays and for threatening Defendant Holma. The Supreme Court has held that a claim for declaratory relief and monetary damages that necessarily implies the invalidity of the punishment imposed, is not cognizable under § 1983 until the conviction has been overturned. *Edwards v. Balisok*, 520 U.S. 641, 648 (1997) (addressing allegations of deceit and bias on the part of the decisionmaker in a misconduct hearing). The Court relied upon *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477, 486-87 (1994), which held that “in order to recover damages for allegedly unconstitutional conviction or imprisonment, *or for other harm caused by actions whose unlawfulness would render a conviction or sentence invalid*, a § 1983 plaintiff must prove that the conviction or sentence has been [overturned].” *Edwards*, 520 U.S. at 646 (emphasis in original). As the Supreme Court recently has stated, “[t]hese cases, taken together, indicate that a state prisoner’s § 1983 action is barred (absent prior invalidation) – no matter the relief sought (damages or equitable relief), no matter the target of the prisoner’s suit (state conduct leading to conviction or internal prison proceedings) – *if* success in that action would necessarily demonstrate the invalidity of confinement or its duration.” *Wilkinson v. Dotson*, 125 S. Ct. 1242, 1248 (2005). Thus, where a prisoner’s claim of unfair procedures in a disciplinary hearing necessarily implies the invalidity of the deprivation of good-time credits, his claim is not cognizable under § 1983. *Id.*; *see also Bailey v. McCoy*, No. 98-1746, 1999 WL 777351, at *2 (6th Cir. Sept. 21, 1999) (collecting Sixth Circuit decisions applying *Edwards* to procedural due process challenges), *cert. denied*, 122 S. Ct. 1795 (2002). *See also Muhammad v. Close*, 540 U.S. 749 (2004) (holding that the *Heck-Edwards* bar applies to prison misconduct challenges only when good-time credits are implicated).

In *Muhammad v. Close*, 540 U.S. 749 (2004), the Supreme Court clarified that *Edwards* requires the favorable termination of a disciplinary proceeding before a civil rights action

may be filed only in cases where the duration of the prisoner's sentence is affected. *See Johnson v. Coolman*, No. 03-1909, 2004 WL 1367271, at *1 (6th Cir. June 15, 2004). In other words, *Edwards* still applies where a plaintiff has lost good time as the result of the misconduct conviction. Under Michigan law, a prisoner loses good time credits for the month of his major misconduct disciplinary conviction. *See* MICH. COMP. LAWS § 800.33. In addition, the warden may order forfeiture of previously accumulated credits in cases. *Id.* Plaintiff does not assert that he did not forfeit good time credit for the month of his conviction. Accordingly, Plaintiff's Eighth Amendment claims remain noncognizable under § 1983 because a ruling on the claim would, if established, necessarily imply the invalidity of his disciplinary conviction. *See Shavers v. Stapleton*, No. 03-2210, 2004 WL 1303359, at *1 (6th Cir. June 9, 2004).

Finally, Plaintiff claims that Defendants Smith, Perttu, and McQuiggin failed to protect him from Defendants Haapala, Holma and Nagele. In its prohibition of "cruel and unusual punishments," the Eighth Amendment places restraints on prison officials, directing that they may not use excessive physical force against prisoners and must also "take reasonable measures to guarantee the safety of the inmates." *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 832 (1994) (quoting *Hudson v. Palmer*, 468 U.S. 517, 526-527 (1984)). Inmates have a constitutionally protected right to personal safety grounded in the Eighth Amendment. *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 833 (1994). Thus, prison staff are obliged "to take reasonable measures to guarantee the safety of the inmates" in their care. *Hudson v. Palmer*, 468 U.S. 517, 526-27 (1984). To establish a violation of this right, Plaintiff must show that Defendant was deliberately indifferent to the Plaintiff's risk of injury. *Walker v. Norris*, 917 F.2d 1449, 1453 (6th Cir.1990); *McGhee v. Foltz*, 852 F.2d 876, 880-881 (6th Cir.1988). While a prisoner does not need to prove that he has been the victim of an actual attack to bring a personal safety claim, he must at least establish that he reasonably fears such an attack.

Thompson v. County of Medina, Ohio, 29 F.3d 238, 242-43 (6th Cir.1994) (holding that plaintiff has the minimal burden of “showing a sufficient inferential connection” between the alleged violation and inmate violence to “justify a reasonable fear for personal safety.”) As noted above, Plaintiff has failed to show that Defendants Haapala, Holma, and Nagele violated his Eighth Amendment rights or that he is in imminent danger of such a violation. Therefore, he is unable to show that Defendants Smith, Perttu, and McQuiggin were deliberately indifferent to a risk of injury.

Recommended Disposition

Having conducted the review now required by the Prison Litigation Reform Act, I recommend that Plaintiff’s complaint be dismissed for failure to state a claim pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). I further recommend that Plaintiff’s motion for a preliminary injunction (Docket #3) be denied. Should this report and recommendation be adopted, the dismissal of this action will count as a strike for purposes of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

I further recommend that the Court find no good-faith basis for appeal within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3). *See McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 611 (6th Cir. 1997).

/s/ Timothy P. Greeley

TIMOTHY P. GREELEY

UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

Dated: January 16, 2008

NOTICE TO PARTIES

Any objections to this Report and Recommendation must be filed and served within ten days of service of this notice on you. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C); FED. R. CIV. P. 72(b). All objections and responses to objections are governed by W.D. Mich. LCivR 72.3(b). Failure to file timely objections may constitute a waiver of any further right of appeal. *United States v. Walters*, 638 F.2d 947 (6th Cir. 1981); *see Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985).